November 10, 2025

The Honorable Mike DeWine
Governor, State of Ohio
Riffe Center, 77 South High St 30th Floor
Columbus, OH 43215

Re: Please don't weaken Ohio's child labor laws by signing SB 50 into law

Dear Governor DeWine:

I write as the chair of the National Consumers League's Child Labor Coalition, which consists of 38 great groups that work collectively to reduce child labor and protect working children. Our members include Human Rights Watch and the National Education Association. I am also the CEO of the National Consumers League, the nation's oldest national consumer advocacy organization, founded in 1899.

At present, Ohio, like many states, follows federal child labor law and allows children to work up to three hours, until 7:00 pm, when school is in session. SB 50 would allow vulnerable 14- and 15-year-olds to work till 9:00 pm on a school night. Extending these hours will impact the ability of students to participate in after-school activities, family occasions, do their homework, and have sufficient sleep to perform to their best abilities in school. Academic research shows that students who work more than 20 hours per week see their grades drop and their school completion rates drop.

Ohio's children are already at risk of violations of existing child labor laws by employers in Ohio. In 2023, the U.S., the Department of Labor reported these alarming violations:

- April 5, 2023, Walnut Creek Lumber, Dundee, OH: A 15-year-old worker was illegally employed in a hazardous occupation – the operation of a sawmill – in which he suffered injury when he became entangled in the gears of a powered wood processing machine. In addition, investigators found four minors under 16 were employed before 7 a.m., for more than 8 hours on non-school days, and more than 40 hours during a non-school week.
- February 22 2023, Mio's Pizza franchises, Cincinnati and Milford, OH: 21 minors under 16 were illegally allowed to use manual fryers, operate gas ovens with an open flame, move pizza in and out of a broiler/conveyor oven, and use a mechanical dough puller and sheeter.
- February 15, 2023, Slim Chickens franchise, Avon, OH: Investigators found that minors under 16 worked more than 3 hours on a school day, in more than 150 instances.

Now is not the time to allow teens to work lager. The later children and teens work, the greater the risk of harm. Children who are working in public-facing roles, such as retail or hospitality, are placed at greater risk of assault and robberies the later into the evening they work.

If children are travelling home from work later, they are also at greater risk of being injured or harmed on the journey home, due to fatigue and the increased prevalence of drivers operating vehicles while under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

The primary cause of teenage deaths is injuries sustained from vehicle accidents, accounting for almost half of all adolescent deaths. We understand that SB 50 aims to lengthen the work day for 14- and 15-year-olds who may not be able to drive, but some of these workers will be at increased risk because they will be ferried to or from work at later hours, often by fellow teen aged workers or teen siblings. Maintaining the current Ohio law setting 7:00 pm as the maximum work time for teen workers will save lives.

Weakening hours protections will also create confusion within the business community as we have seen in states like Iowa, where hours protections were weakened and employers became confused and did not realize that they were still legally obligated to adhere to stricter, more protective federal laws. Members of the business community became angry and expressed frustration to lawmakers.

Extending allowable working hours for teens will add to the enforcement burden of understaffed federal and state labor inspectors. Given the rampant violations of the current child labor laws, and the lack of demand from voters for later working hours for their children, there is no justifiable reason for the State of Ohio to roll back long-standing child labor laws.

I would like to close with the words of a young Ohioan, teenager Michelle Huang of Olentangy Liberty Hich School in Powel, Ohio, who, writing in an award-winning student letter in a *New York Times* writing contest, noted alarming increases of child labor in meat-packing facilities and in the Gerber's Poultry in Kidron, Ohio. Children, some as young as 14, were working in dangerous conditions and overnight.

"Instead of strengthening protections," said Michelle. "Ohio introduced Senate Bill 50 – a law that would loosen restrictions, letting 14 and 15-year-olds work longer hours during the school year. Supporters call it a solution to the labor shortage. But we, the children, aren't the answer to adult problems."

"I'm a high school student. I wake up before the sun rises to finish calculus homework, bounce between college classes and club meetings, and squeeze in time to study for the ACT," Michelle continued. "My days are packed with ambition, not out of obligation, but out of hope — hope that what I'm doing now might open doors in the future. That's what childhood should offer: a runway, not a cage. So when I hear about kids my age scrubbing meatpacking floors at midnight, I can't help but wonder what futures they've been forced to forfeit. What subjects they're too tired to learn. What dreams they've quietly folded away."

We once worked together on an auto safety measure when you served in the US Senate representing the state of Ohio, and I worked for *Consumer Reports* as a child safety advocate trying to save little lives with the help of backup cameras in all motor vehicles. You were very supportive of our work and because of you and other elected officials, now every vehicle sold in America has a backup camera. Hundreds of children's lives have been saved as a result.

Governor, we urge you to protect our children, to honor the proud history of Ohio by vetoing SB 50, and to preserve current child labor protections. The safety, education, and protection of Ohio's future is in your hands.

Sincerely,

Sally Greenberg

Executive Director,

National Consumers League & Chair of the Child Labor Coalition